

Serial No. 10/707,157

**REMARKS**

Reconsideration of this application as amended is respectfully requested.

Claims 1, 3 and 13 have been amended and new claims 20-38 have been added.

Claims 1-6 and 9-10 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Shinichi (JP 8175453) in view of Zoor (US 5249879). Claim 1 has been amended to recite that an open-ended slot is disposed at each of the first and second ends of the tubular body and that the follower assembly includes first and second expander elements that are configured to radially deform the first and second ends of the tubular body in response to displacement of the follower assembly by the lever actuator. The combination of Shinichi and Zoor fails to disclose a follower assembly that includes first and second expander elements configured to radially deform the first and second ends of the tubular body in response to displacement of the follower assembly by the lever actuator. For this reason, the rejection of claim 1 should be withdrawn.

Claims 2-6 and 9-10 were rejected as claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a). Since claims 2-6 and 9-10 depend directly or indirectly from and contain all the limitations of claim 1 as amended, they are felt to overcome the obviousness rejection in the same manner as amended claim 1.

Claim 20 recites an axle assembly that includes a first spring configured to resist displacement of the first expander element by the lever actuator. None of the cited references disclose an axle assembly having a spring configured to resist displacement of the first expander element by the lever actuator. For this reason, claim 20 is believed to be patentable over the cited references. Since claims 21-38 depend directly or indirectly from claim 20, they are felt to be patentable over the cited references in the same manner as claim 20.

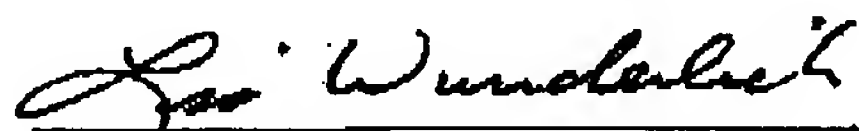
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Enclosed is a credit card payment for the amount of \$900 to cover the fee for the additional 18 claims.

This amendment is believed to be fully responsive to the comments and suggestions of the Examiner and to place this application in condition for allowance. Favorable action is requested.

Respectfully submitted,

ROSE et al.



Lisa J. Wunderlich, Attorney  
Registration No. 40,307  
SRAM Corporation  
1333 N. Kingsbury, 4th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60622  
(312) 664-3652